



Journal of Alpine Research | Revue de géographie alpine

102-1 | 2014

Ressources territoriales, développement et tourisme,
II : Qualités, Risques et Contradictions

Construction of a place brand

The Valais brand or the virtues and risks of place branding

Jacques Felix Michelet and Frédéric Giraut



Electronic version

URL: <http://journals.openedition.org/rga/2321>

DOI: 10.4000/rga.2321

ISSN: 1760-7426

Publisher

Association pour la diffusion de la recherche alpine

Electronic reference

Jacques Felix Michelet and Frédéric Giraut, « Construction of a place brand », *Journal of Alpine Research | Revue de géographie alpine* [Online], 102-1 | 2014, Online since 14 July 2014, connection on 20 April 2019. URL : <http://journals.openedition.org/rga/2321> ; DOI : 10.4000/rga.2321

This text was automatically generated on 20 April 2019.



La Revue de Géographie Alpine est mise à disposition selon les termes de la licence Creative Commons Attribution - Pas d'Utilisation Commerciale - Pas de Modification 4.0 International.

Construction of a place brand

The Valais brand or the virtues and risks of place branding

Jacques Felix Michelet and Frédéric Giraut

EDITOR'S NOTE

Translation: Henderson Traduction

Place brands, specific qualities and resources: a complex of opportunities for regional development

- 1 The assertion of the qualities of a particular place as part of a regional development process is made using different methods and means when it comes to promoting a tourist destination, positioning a city, or protecting or promoting the origin of a particular type of production. Apart from the critical approaches that resituate these movements in that of a spectacularisation and commodification of place semiotics (Baur & Thiery, 2014), the existing literature in the field of place marketing treats these different approaches separately while favouring sector-based approaches. However, the increasing interest in place brands is attracting attention to these approaches in numerous cross-sector contexts, such as tourist resorts, world cities, and agricultural regions (Anholt, 2007; Moilanen & Rainisten, 2009). The process underlines both the tangible and intangible values and qualities to which the brand must refer through the perception, image and reputation of the place or region in question. Communication and mobilisation strategies are implemented through the invention of, and adherence to, a place narrative (Hjortegaard-Hansen, 2010), which, in proclaiming its values, may generate emotions in addition to its certified qualities. The place brand thus appears as something that goes beyond sector-based logic, where the challenge is to combine the involvement of numerous actors and different origins and to integrate the specificities of different places making up the particular geographic entity (Allaire, 2002; Hanna & Rolley, 2008).

- 2 Re-integrated in a sectoral framework, in this case that of tourism, a cross analysis of place branding and destination labelling approaches (Marcotte *et al.*, 2012) underlines their complementarity, but also the different nature of the two approaches. The label does not eliminate competition, even if the destinations that benefit from it are partners in maintaining its reputation. On the contrary, labelling situates a destination within a group of potentially competitive destinations offering the same guarantees of quality. Indeed, it provides guarantees that are more dependable than the brand, which is very vulnerable: “although the brand of a destination can strengthen the image of the destination, uncontrollable variables – such as a political crisis or terrorism – can negatively affect the image of the destination (translation)” (Marcotte *et al.*, 2012).
- 3 The basket of goods notion (Pecqueur, 2001) enables us to return to the economic and spatial foundations for the construction of a brand being linked to the identification of specific resources. Thus, the basket of goods comes under the overall promotion of a group of goods and services, where the economic rent of the group is greater than the sum of each of its elements. These goods and services are endowed with specific place qualities consistent with a area-based project and a heritage. This relates to the notion of territorial resource, which assumes the existence of a process of revelation or invention that enables the promotion of the specific dimension of a resource, depending on its context of production or emergence, and related qualities (Gumuchian and Pecqueur, 2007; Landel and Senil, 2009; Camagni *et al.*, 2004). The territorial, or area-based, resource is particularly important in local or regional development projects for marginal or peripheral regions that benefit from the energy of peripheral innovation (Giraut, 2009; Gloersen *et al.*, 2010), but do not benefit from agglomeration economies, metropolitan assets or conditions of competitiveness on the market of generic goods (Maillat and Kebir, 2001, Benko & Lipietz, 2000). For Pecqueur, it represents a “reconnection” of the economy with its local area, providing an opportunity for peripheral regions to escape from general competition by shifting from technological externalities to cultural externalities.

The Valais Brand: the secrets of conspicuous good practice

- 4 The construction of the “Valais” place brand took place within the framework of a region that although composite has a strong territorial identity. On the one hand, it is a bilingual Swiss canton, based on an upstream/downstream division, while on the other, it is a mountain canton, comprising partially urban municipalities in the lowland areas and essentially rural and tourist municipalities in the mountainous parts. In addition, the canton has several of the country’s emblematic attractions, namely the Matterhorn, and unique productions, particularly those related to cheese, fruit and wine production. The construction of a brand at the scale of such a region thus has a considerable potential and obvious assets, but it functions on the basis of a complex assembly of cultures, places, milieus, products and scales of reference. It is therefore worthy of analysis as a multi-scale, integrative and cross-cutting experience that associates the different approaches of place marketing. It can be envisaged, on the one hand, from the point of view of the method, the interplay of the actors mobilised, and the original strategic choices with regard to place marketing and, on the other, from the point of view of the myths, symbols and images explicitly or implicitly invoked.

An interplay of actors and original strategic choices

- 5 The Valais brand is promoted by the non-profit association Marque Valais (AMVS) that was renamed the Association des Entreprises Valais Excellence (AVEX) in 2013. The origin of this change dates back to 1998 with the adoption by the Valais Parliament of the sustainable development charter, which served as a basis for the project. It was within the framework of this cantonal tourism policy, which identifies the “Valais Excellence” and “unique brand” projects as key measures, that the main actors in the Valais economy were brought together, namely the umbrella organisations¹ and, as the policy was gradually implemented, the certified businesses. In 2003, it was decided to abandon the individual brands of the agricultural and tourism sectors for a single brand.
- 6 Three aspects of the procedures involved in setting up the Valais brand are particularly important in understanding the interplay of the different actors: an approach that was intentionally elitist, the avoidance of sectoral interests, and flexible criteria of attribution.

Establishing a place brand “is first of all killing consensus”!

- 7 Whereas the majority of place marketing approaches underline the initial difficulty of reaching and maintaining a consensus among a maximum of political and economic actors around the brand, the Valais brand deliberately chose to reverse the priorities. The main methodological challenge in reaching the political objective of a single and cross-sectoral brand at the scale of the canton was to not attempt to achieve a regional consensus at any price. On the contrary, what was put in place with the Valais brand was a subtle balance between, on one side, the “political” logic of the brand based on the involvement of all the public and private actors in the geographic entity in question and, on the other, the “economic” logic of the brand. The latter must convey a selective dimension of excellence in order to pull the economic actors, and through them the regional economy, towards performance and external recognition.
- 8 In other words, for the Valais brand, which resulted from an initiative of the canton’s economic promotion services, it was a question of managing to ignore the political objectives of cohesion, which are both consensual and vote-catching, to concentrate on a strategy considered effective in terms of economic competitiveness. From this perspective, it appeared counter-productive to attribute the brand to any regional product simply because of its location. It was therefore necessary to make choices in function of the unique character and potential for development of products perceived as emblematic of the canton. Two main difficulties then had to be taken into account. First it was important not to refrain from giving priority to the association of all the actors in a consensual spatial initiative, just so as to be able to impose a charter of selective membership and to display ambitions of sustainability considered as “elitist” (see insert on the “values” and objectives of the brand, figure 1). Similarly, it was necessary to restrict the politician to defining strategic objectives and the means that can be mobilised to leave the association a certain amount of freedom in defining operational measures and attribution criteria. This strategy was all the more ambitious given that the place brand carries the name of the canton and is the result of an initiative of its executive.

Figure 1. Extract of the presentation of the Brand and its “values”

La marque Valais

Une marque pour distinguer ce que le Valais vous offre de meilleur!

Nous avons conçu la marque Valais comme un signe de reconnaissance de provenance et de qualité pour des produits emblématiques du Valais. La marque Valais est une marque collective multisectorielle qui a comme ambition de promouvoir le Valais auprès des consommateurs et des hôtes. Par la marque Valais, le consommateur doit avoir la certitude d'acheter et de consommer un produit de qualité mais qui, en plus, provient d'une entreprise soucieuse du respect de l'environnement et de l'éthique sociale.

La marque Valais repose sur quatre valeurs centrales :

- ▶ **La qualité** (qualité des produits et des services)
- ▶ **L'humain** (hommes et femmes, engagement, fidélité, partage, échange, accueil)
- ▶ **Le mouvement** (action, entreprendre, dynamisme, énergie, Force, vitalité, vie)
- ▶ **Le bien-être** (qualité de vie, plaisir, hédonisme, équilibre, sérénité)

Pour obtenir le droit de porter cet emblème synonyme de qualité, les produits sont soumis à une procédure sélective.

Les critères d'attribution de cette marque sont :

- ▶ **La provenance valaisanne des produits,**
- ▶ **Le respect d'un cahier des charges spécifique,**
- ▶ **L'engagement à respecter les valeurs de la marque et les principes du développement durable.**



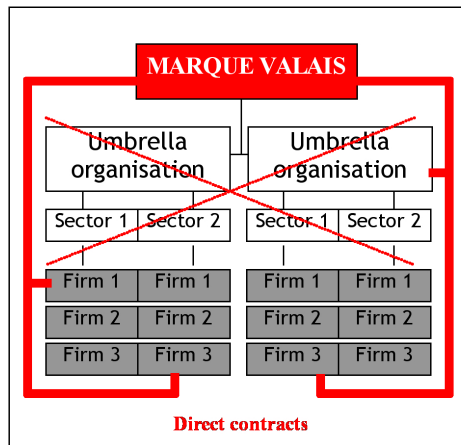
WEB SITE: [HTTP://WWW.VALAIS-COMMUNITY.CH/FR/CONTENUS/LA-MARQUE-VALAIS-0-16](http://www.valais-community.ch/fr/contenus/la-marque-valais-0-16)

- 9 Selection takes place by limiting brand access to businesses that share its “values” and is aimed at creating a dynamic of a “club of excellence” between different businesses in the canton, the stated long-term objective being to boost the entire economy. The club focuses on sustainable development and excellence. This involves establishing a benchmark for quality, rather than imposing specific actions that should take place automatically once the conversion has taken place. By way of example, the application of the Valais automobile rally to join the “club” was not accepted because the event involved conflict with the values promoted by the brand.

From the impossible integration of sector-based branches to the idea of the “club”

- 10 Both the productive part (namely agribusiness) and service part (namely tourism) of the Valais economic fabric have access to financial and organisational resources and expertise within each industry sector. The weakness of this type of regional economic organisation – which is fairly common – lies, in fact, in its organisation in terms of sectors and rigidly structured umbrella organisations. Indeed, taking into account the theories on territorial resources, innovative environments and local productive systems, it is difficult, in a context of internal competition and even inherited rivalries, to define a common strategic position (Maillat & Kebir, 2001; Pecqueur, 2001, Camagni *et al.*, 2004).
- 11 Furthermore, in many cases these associations are made up of delegates with no real decision-making power. In addition, the bottom-up logic of grouping together branches in a sector, and then sectors in associations, prevents any general position being reached, each of the members defending first their profession, then their micro-region, etc. In such a context, the definition of cross-cutting objectives becomes very difficult, as does deciding on an organisation responsible for implementing a selective strategy.

Figure 2. How the logic of Valais Brand goes beyond the inherited sector-based organisation



J. MICHELET IN GLOERSEN ET AL., 2013

- 12 The organisational innovation of the Valais brand consists of getting round the problem of organisation in terms of sectors and associations in order to offer a direct contract to entrepreneurs who are ready to adapt to its requirements. The strength of the process lies in the fact that it is an individual and voluntary procedure for joining the “club”. Since the latter is not reserved for entrepreneurs only, the umbrella associations or public authorities are also eligible, as well as all the organisations that share the vision proclaimed by the Valais brand. The idea is to avoid any obligation of representativeness in order to move forward with those who actively support the approach and accept its constraints. By virtue of its conception, which is intimately related to the image of the mountains, the Valais brand appeals first and foremost to the tourism and agricultural sectors. But they are not alone. Other service businesses and associations also find values proclaimed by the brand that correspond to those they would like to be identified with (excellence, dynamism, responsibility, pride, etc.). By 2013, the Valais brand had thus attracted a little more than a hundred members from fields as far diverse as administration and viticulture, and included private schools, industrial firms, tourism offices and banks².

Different forms of promotion depending on the stakeholder

- 13 At the crossroads between a place marketing approach based on communication and a more economic approach based on the “social and environmental responsibilities of businesses”, the Valais brand association combines two types of labelling: the *Valais brand* itself and the *Valais excellence label*.

Figure 3. The logo of the Valais Excellence label, an international certification for local products and services



GUIDE LA MARQUE, 2011

- 14 “The Valais excellence label distinguishes the canton’s best businesses and institutions and the most responsible corporate citizens, concerned about their social and environmental role and willing to work towards a continuous improvement in the services they provide (translation)” (Guide la Marque, 2011). Its objective is to provide consumers with different guarantees on behalf of the certified business: its Valaisan origin, its management quality (ISO 9001), its environmental responsibility (ISO 14001) and its commitment to corporate responsibility in environmental and social matters (sustainable development). While the Valais brand, with its system of continuous development, currently has some 80% of its firms in traditional activities (tourism, agriculture), the trend among the labelling processes in progress since 2012 is around 80% for sectors with a less direct relationship with the local area, such as transport, industry, and technical offices. To support the firms involved in this effort, the association proposes customized *coaching* as well as a network to exchange experiences with the other businesses in the club. For a very small firm or an NGO, it is thus possible to obtain these ISO labels at a reduced cost. The stated objective is to get the business culture to evolve towards sustainable development by meeting precise specifications.

Figure 4. The Valais Brand logo, recognition of the emblematic products of the region



GUIDE LA MARQUE, 2011

- 15 With a view to place marketing for regional identity purposes, the Valais brand is displayed by all emblematic products of the region³ (the idea of the basket of goods) and in all communications relating to them. The attribution criteria are demanding, however,

and mainly concern their origin in the Valais canton, the compliance with required specifications, and a commitment to respect brand values. In this way, the first objective of this multi-sector brand is to promote the Valais both with consumers and visitors. It is therefore a tool that provides its beneficiaries with support in terms of communications, enabling them to position themselves in the market through the reputation of the brand. In return, the entire economic fabric of the canton may benefit in coherence and visibility in economic, touristic and, finally, territorial communications. Thus the Valais brand, in addition to fulfilling a “basket of goods” type function, also serves the objective of promoting the Valaisan economy outside the region, transferring the qualities of its local area and its inhabitants to the goods and services produced there.

- 16 Although efforts are made towards linking the use of the Valais brand with the Valais excellence certification, the label and the brand are two complementary tools. The authorisation to use one or the other obeys strict criteria, depending on the issuing authority (red) and the type of communication (grey) (figure 5).

Figure 5. VALAIS BRAND AND VALAIS EXCELLENCE LABEL: STRUCTURAL ORGANISATION

Critères d'attribution de la marque Valais et du label Valais excellence en fonction de l'émetteur et du type de communication

| Émetteurs | Communication sur l'entreprise | Publicité image | Publicité pour un produit | Packaging d'un produit |
|--|---|--|---|---|
| Institutions de promotion (Ass. faitières) | utilisation autorisée le label Valais excellence → L'institution doit être certifiée Valais excellence | utilisation autorisée la marque Valais → Uniquement pour les branches emblématiques → La publicité doit respecter le code de marque Valais | utilisation autorisée la marque Valais → Uniquement pour les produits qui sont enregistrés dans la liste des produits "Valais" | |
| Entreprises labellisées Valais excellence | utilisation autorisée le label Valais excellence | utilisation autorisée le label Valais excellence → Obligatoirement associé à une information sur la démarche de l'entreprise la marque Valais → Uniquement pour les branches emblématiques → La publicité doit respecter le code de marque Valais | utilisation autorisée le label Valais excellence → Obligatoirement associé à une information sur la démarche de l'entreprise la marque Valais → Uniquement pour les produits qui sont enregistrés dans la liste des produits "Valais" | utilisation autorisée la marque Valais → Uniquement pour les produits qui sont enregistrés dans la liste des produits "Valais" |
| Entreprises non labellisées Valais excellence | utilisations non autorisées – Ni la marque Valais Ni le label Valais excellence | utilisations non autorisées – Ni la marque Valais Ni le label Valais excellence | utilisation autorisée la marque Valais → Uniquement pour les produits qui sont enregistrés dans la liste des produits "Valais" → Les produits répondent à un cahier des charges précis et ont été certifiés → L'entreprise a signé la charte marque Valais | utilisation autorisée la marque Valais → Uniquement pour les produits qui sont enregistrés dans la liste des produits "Valais" → Les produits répondent à un cahier des charges précis et ont été certifiés → L'entreprise a signé la charte marque Valais |

* Liste établie à partir des critères d'attribution de la marque (voir www.marquevalais.org)

GUIDE LA MARQUE, 2011, [HTTP://WWW.VALAIS-COMMUNITY.CH/MULTIMEDIA/DOCS/2012/02/0_INTRODUCTION.PDF](http://www.valais-community.ch/multimedia/docs/2012/02/0_INTRODUCTION.PDF)

- 17 Thus by allowing non-certified businesses that produce elements of the basket of goods to use the logo of the brand under “advantageous” conditions, the Valais brand enlarges its spatial penetration, its visibility on the markets, and the diffusion of its “values”. Furthermore, with the Valais Excellence certification, it deploys a logic that is more strictly economic to realise its vision of boosting the entire economy of the canton by mixing traditional tools of certification and citizen commitment. The whole process is associated with a policy proclaimed as being “win-win”, where the qualities of the place are transferred to its inhabitants and their products or services, and where the basket of goods contributes, in return, to a positive image for the regional economic system, which can base its external promotion on a distinctive and positive symbol.

Myths and symbols: internally unifying, externally evocative

- 18 The brand logo (figure 4), like the Swiss national flag to which it makes reference, plays a federative role internally and that of an identifier externally. Here the logo is more than an emblem; it is a place communication tool. Necessarily simplistic, the logo represents an image that replaces words in a visual communication. It must be instantly recognisable, while at the same time evoking all the underlying concepts and the scales to which it alludes. Its constituent elements, that is, all the associated symbols and values, can be readily deciphered: “While together the signs represent the image of the Valais, individually each conveys certain values to be promoted more strongly (translation)”(Guide la marque, 2011)
- 19 In this manner, the logo conveys the message that the canton is a concentrated version, possibly even the essence, of the Switzerland of mountains, attempting to capture those qualities that have been perceived and patiently capitalised during the 20th century: the very essence of the Swiss mountains (the Matterhorn), with a little extra, and the star (excellence) replacing the federal cross (white). Capitalising on this largely consensual image for the local population and businesses, and mobilising Swiss myths and symbols, the logo thus rallies diverse elements internally and sends out a strong message externally.

A process that can be exported, evidence of the approach's potential

- 20 The characteristics specific to the brand and the label (cantonal scale, the club idea, circumvention of the branch and sectoral organisations) have contributed to both a model and a reference of the *best practice* type. The Valais brand thus now enjoys a network for the exchange of experiences with other regions. The innovative and atypical (in terms of structure) character of the brand seems to attract French-speaking candidates to an approach that has now become a reference. Some exchanges may be informal, particularly with regions that do not have a label, such as Auvergne, Paris, and the departments of the Lot and the Var, but there are also exchanges structured by a contract to transfer the experience of the Valais brand to other regions to help them embark on similar undertakings (Picardy Region, Wallonia Region, Bernese Oberland and, since 2012, the Var department).

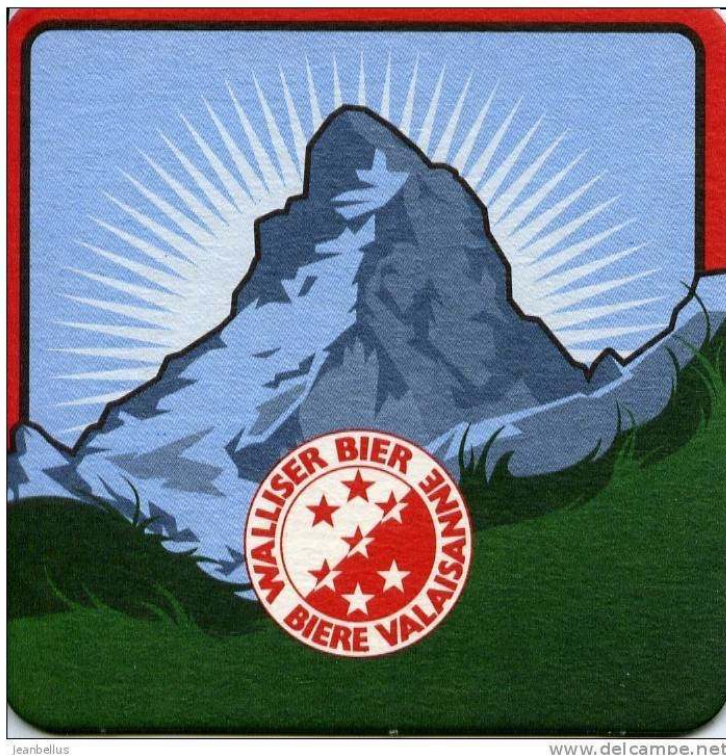
Significant contradictions that underline the inherent risks of the approach

- 21 Although the Valais brand has achieved considerable success, attracting numerous members, enjoying wide recognition, and being regarded by many as exemplary, the contradictions to overcome in such an approach are nevertheless numerous and the region has, it would seem, been subjected to a certain number of risks that could potentially damage its reputation and thus undermine the credibility of the brand.

Individual approaches, outside the club and therefore... in competition?

- 22 Given that the logic underpinning the club excludes initiatives and the production of goods or services that do not have a specific character or do not reflect the “values” of the brand, and given that it does not accept businesses that do not wish to commit to an external labelling process outside their sectoral structures, conflict can arise with competitive marketing approaches. The example of Bière Valaisanne (Valais Beer), founded in 1865, is spectacular. The firm, based in Sion, capital of the canton, is an independent brewery, not part of any major group, which therefore cultivates its local character for the production of a generic product. The firm has not signed up to the Valais brand but has launched a campaign by capitalising on its independent character and on its name, which also makes reference to the canton and its attributes. In its advertising campaign, it does not hesitate to also refer to the Matterhorn, the nation’s emblematic “high place”, thus making use of visual imagery close to that of the Valais brand (figure 6). Although different actors in the canton have long been using such references, what is new since the creation of the canton brand name is that they may now possibly undermine the credibility of the Valais brand simply by adding to the number of similar visual images and uncontrolled references.

Figure 6. Beer mat advertising Valais beer, 2013



A DOUBLE REFERENCE, ON THE ONE HAND, TO THE CANTON’S COAT OF ARMS IN SWISS COLOURS, ITS LOCAL DISTRICTS, AND BILINGUALISM AND, ON THE OTHER, TO SWITZERLAND’S EMBLEMATIC “HIGH-PLACE”, THE MATTERHORN, SHINING LIKE A BEACON OF LIGHT.

Local development approaches discredited

- 23 In the light of this strong focus on the cantonal scale to promote heritage and local resources, it is not without interest to examine recent failures in inter-municipal development initiatives (between local and cantonal). Thus, although the brand is linked to the cantonal executive and has made the choice of a selective policy based on a club of excellence, it must nevertheless compensate for what appears as a lack of support for actors “on the ground”. It does this by being very present, via its extension, Valais Community, during events related to heritage and identity, such as the cantonal final of the cow fighting competition in Aproz (figure 7).

Figure 7. The Valais Brand was present at Verbier-St-Bernard (which has the Valais Brand label) for the 2012 cow-fighting championship held in Aproz (fighting cow of the Herens breed).



FOR THE FIRST TIME, THE 2012 CHAMPIONSHIP WITNESSED A CROSS-BORDER FINAL (AOSTE AND CHAMONIX VALLEYS), WITH THE COLLABORATION OF ESPACE MONT BLANC.

PHOTO: ALBERTO CAMPI

- 24 In this context, and although this type of inter-municipal action is encouraged by the Valais Brand, one can legitimately question whether there is any added value from having an additional regional label to validate the efforts of rural heritage development, at the scale of a side valley, for example. Thus, while the Valais Brand provides goods and services produced with a cantonal reference suitable for the national and international markets, the local reference “would suffice” for their identification in the cantonal market, and even the national market for the best known. This could explain the difficulty in setting up real local projects or initiatives within the canton.
- 25 It may also be suggested that the omnipresence of the cantonal place reference has played a role, along with other local factors, in the failure to establish a regional natural park in Val d’Hérens. Fear of the park and its potential limiting effect on the possibilities of increasing land values through the construction of second homes certainly played a

major role (Petite, 2011) in the failure of the park initiative, but this might also have suffered from the canton's feeling of already being sufficiently endowed with respect to place labelling.

- 26 Parallel to this lack of credibility for new inter-municipal initiatives, there have also been attempts and manoeuvres to harness aspects relating to identity and place for promotional purposes at the local scale. Thanks to an inter-municipal cooperative agreement within a tourist destination area characterised by uneven power sharing among its stakeholders, the emblem of the Saint Bernard dog was “captured” by the resort of Verbier, even though it was already well endowed as an *alpine resort* (Diener *et al.*, 2006). This development was to the detriment of the rural municipalities in the Grand Saint Bernard valley that were looking for a new lease of life and for which the Saint Bernard dog is the main resource.

The Valais Brand in danger of being alone against all!

- 27 Finally, and perhaps most importantly, the reputation of a canton having deliberately opted for the development of a “tourism of construction” may have a negative influence on the marketing efforts directed at a target clientele (the urban Swiss in this case) and run the risk of devaluing the place brand. This is probably what happened, at least in the short term, with the federal vote on the Weber initiative. With the aim of saving the Swiss mountain landscape, the initiative focused on limiting the possibilities of building second homes and targeted, in particular, the mountain municipalities committed to residential tourism (cf. on this subject, *Journal of Alpine Research / Revue de géographie alpine*: Debarbieux, 2012; Petite, 2012; Schuller et Dessemontet, 2012). This proposal obtained a narrow victory (50.6%) at the federal level, but received much greater support in the metropolitan regions. Opposition to the initiative during the electoral campaign came essentially from the elected officials, entrepreneurs and general electorate of Valais (close to 75% rejected the initiative in the canton, the highest rejection rate of all the Swiss cantons).
- 28 Following the vote, the official responsible for the Valais Brand was strongly condemned in the canton by different entrepreneurs and elected officials for having dared to express concerns about the massive commitment of the canton and its representatives in a struggle that could be wrongly interpreted. Thus, the canton of Valais could have been seen as engaged in a struggle for the right to devastate the mountain landscape in the name of freedom for mountain dwellers to increase the value of their resources and particularly their land.

Figure 8. Mix and Remix cartoons



PUBLISHED IN 2012 AND 2013 IN *L'HEBDO* MAGAZINE

Figure 9. Front page of daily newspaper *Le Matin* after the votes of 2012, on the Lex Weber, and of 2013, on the Planning Law (LAT).



THE COMPARISON WITH CORSICA (HIGHLIGHTED HERE BY THE SITE CORSICA INFURMAZIONE) MAY APPEAR QUITE PARADOXICAL SINCE THE ISLAND HAS EXPERIENCED RECURRENT ACTION AGAINST SECOND HOMES AND NOT HAD THE STRONG SUPPORT FOR THEIR DEVELOPMENT AS IN THE VALAIS CANTON. IT REFLECTS, HOWEVER, THE SITUATION OF A CANTON THAT, FOLLOWING A SERIES OF VOTES, APPEARS IN A PARTICULARLY AWKWARD POSITION WITH REGARD TO CERTAIN MAJORITY REPRESENTATIONS AT THE FEDERAL LEVEL.

- 29 A collection of cartoons published in the press of the Lake Geneva region in 2012 and 2013 (figure 8, figure 9) gives an idea of the image conveyed by the Valais. Although it is still too early to assess any possible negative effects on the campaign to promote the Valais brand, this episode already provides us with some interesting insights into the risks for a place brand when faced with a possible deterioration of the image of that place through political events.
- 30 Here, the risk relates to the potential degradation of the canton's image, and the associated community of the people of Valais within the Confederation, following a vote in which the Valais clearly distinguished itself as being different, particularly from the metropolitan areas, in their conception of the mountains. For city dwellers, the mountain landscape is seen as a common good and a rare resource not to be squandered by the indigenous population. This antagonism, which suddenly became visible, is the reason for a degradation of the canton's image at the national level, that is, with respect to Swiss citizens who are clients for the numerous goods and services covered by the brand and the label. At the international level, the impact is certainly much more limited. Indeed, many Valais alpine resorts frequented by international clientele operate in a somewhat isolated manner (Diener *et al.*, 2006), totally cutting them off from their immediate environment. The possibility that the touristic place and holiday destination is seen as part of a cantonal collective entity and its political choices is very weak here, even if this

international clientele is also targeted by the place branding type communication and the attribution of associated values.

Conclusion

- 31 The place branding experience of the Swiss canton of Valais appears particularly ambitious and, in its implementation at a comprehensive regional scale, can be considered exemplary both in terms of its success and its innovative cross-sector and cross-scale character. However, the Valais experience is also instructive from the point of view of the risks associated with such an approach. In Valais, the risk concerns the construction of a group of qualities under a brand that is too closely associated with the image of a region and a related community. Thus, the political choices of the majority in this community may prove to be at odds with conceptions held by the majority in the contemporary metropolitan societies, in this case leading to widely differing views on the management of the landscape resource at the heart of place dynamics and representations.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

- ANHOLT S., 2007.– *Competitive identity : The New Brand Management for Nations, Cities and Regions*, Palgrave.
- ALLAIRE G., 2002.– « L'économie de la qualité, en ses secteurs, ses territoires et ses mythes », *Géographie Économie Société*, 4(2), p. 155-180.
- BAUR R., THIÉRY S. (eds.), 2014.– *Don't brand my public space*, Lars Muller Publishers.
- BENKO G., LIPIETZ A., 2000.– *La richesse des régions. Pour une géographie socio-économique*, Presses Universitaires de France.
- CAMAGNI R., MAILLAT D., MATTEACCIOLI A. (dir.), 2004.– *Ressources naturelles et culturelles, milieux et développement local*, Éditions EDES.
- DEBARBIEUX B., 2013.– « Le paysage alpin, impossible bien commun de la Suisse et des Suisses ? », in *Journal of Alpine Research | Revue de géographie alpine, Forum, Issues at stake in the Swiss vote of 11 March 2012 regarding second homes*, 10 janvier 2013, vu le 1^{er} décembre 2013.
- DECORZANT Y. et al. (dir.), 2012.– *Le Made in Switzerland : mythes, fonctions et réalités*, Schwabe.
- DIENER R. et al., 2006.– *La Suisse : portrait urbain*, Birkhäuser.
- GIRAUT F., 2009.– « Innovation et territoires : les effets contradictoires de la marginalité », *Journal of Alpine Research | Revue de Géographie Alpine*, 97-1.
- GLØERSEN, E. et al., 2010.– *Handbook of territorial diversity*, ESPON Program.
- GLOERSEN E. et al., 2013.– *Territorial Diversity (TeDi), Final Report*, ESPON Program.

- HANNA S., ROWLEY J., 2008.- « An analysis of terminology use in place branding », *Place branding and public diplomacy*, 4 (1), p. 61-75.
- HJORTEGAARD-HANSEN R., 2010.- « The narrative nature of place branding », *Place Branding and Public Diplomacy*, 6 (4), p. 268-279.
- GUMUCHIAN H., PECQUEUR B. (dir.), 2007. – *La ressource territoriale*, Anthropos.
- LANDEL P.A., SENIL N., 2009.- « Patrimoine et territoire, les nouvelles ressources du développement », *Revue Développement durable et territoires*.
- MAILLAT D. & KEBIR L., 2001.- « Conditions-cadres et compétitivité des régions : une relecture », *Canadian Journal of Regional Science*, 24 (1), p. 41-56.
- MARCOTTE P., BOURDEAU L., AND LEROUX E., 2012.- « Branding et labels en tourisme: réticences et défis », *Management & Avenir*, 7, p. 205-222
- MICHELET J., 2008.- *Régionalisation & politique régionale dans les Alpes Suisses : quelles stratégies et quel avenir-perspectives valaisannes*, Thèse, Université Joseph-Fourier-Grenoble I.
- MOILANEN T. & RAINISTO S. 2009.- *How to brand nations, cities and destinations : a planning book for place branding*, Palgrave.
- PECQUEUR B., 2001.- « Qualité et développement territorial : l'hypothèse du panier de biens et de services territorialisés », *Économie Rurale*, 261, p. 37-49.
- PETITE M., 2011.- « Le Parc d'Hérens et les Clichés », *Le Temps*, 14 décembre.
- PETITE M., 2013.- « Les montagnards face aux écolos », *Journal of Alpine Research | Revue de géographie alpine, Forum, Issues at stake in the Swiss vote of 11 March 2012 regarding second homes*, 10 January 2013, lu le 1er décembre 2013.
- SCHULER M. & DESSEMONTET P., 2013.- « Le vote suisse pour la limitation des résidences secondaires », *Journal of Alpine Research | Revue de géographie alpine, Forum, Issues at stake in the Swiss vote of 11 March 2012 regarding second homes*, 31 January 2013, lu le 1er décembre 2013.
- VALAIS COMMUNITY, 2011.- *Guide la Marque*.

NOTES

1. Valais Tourisme, the Valais Chamber of Commerce and Industry, and the Valais Chamber of Agriculture.
2. Complete list: <http://www.valais-community.ch/fr/entreprises/>
3. Liste complète à l'adresse : <http://www.valais-community.ch/fr/produits/>

ABSTRACTS

The approach adopted by the Swiss canton of Valais to develop a place brand – the attribution of an overall quality relating to the characteristics, excellence and originality of a place and to a group of products and services – appears exemplary in that it has been instrumental in

developing tourism and agricultural production, and promoting industry. The canton, which enjoys a reputation as a tourist destination (several renowned resorts) and is part of a well-known and distinctive river basin (the upper Rhone), comprises, however, a variety of motivations and interest groups at smaller scales relating to the different mountain massifs and valleys. In such a context, it is both the image and reputation of the canton as a whole that constitute the main resource, a situation that is, however, not without risk when the canton finds itself in a awkward position in relation to the new metropolitan values (in the Swiss context) of political ecology on the question of landscape and second homes.

INDEX

Keywords: place branding, basket of goods, localised productive systems, territorial resource, heritage, Valais, regional development

AUTHORS

JACQUES FELIX MICHELET

Département de géographie et environnement, Université de Genève

FRÉDÉRIC GIRAUT

Département de géographie et environnement, Université de Genève